

Windsor, Ontario city workers strike

Reject the concessions contract!

Socialist Equality Party (Canada)
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Windsor municipal workers should reject the concessions agreement that has been reached between the city and the Canadian Union of Public Employees. While CUPE officials are not revealing the details of the tentative settlement, everything points to the fact that the union has dropped the central issue in the bitter, 100-day strike: post-retirement benefits for new hires.

City officials, backed by the media, are gloating about their success. The CBC notes, “Although details of the tentative agreement have not been released, there are hints the union did not get the protection for retirement benefits it was seeking.”

The *Windsor Star* has published numerous articles, which have not been contradicted by the leaders of CUPE Locals 543 and 82, indicating that benefits “for new hires are off the table.” Jean Fox of Local 543 “confirmed” this, saying that, “The issues now are mostly around wages and language.”

If CUPE has dropped this demand, in return for a meager wage increase and a lump sum of whatever amount, it would be an out-and-out betrayal. The public position of union officials, that they will not recommend a vote one way or the other, is deceitful. They have negotiated this deal, they are putting it before the membership, they obviously hope that workers will accept it.

If CUPE officials are afraid to stand behind the agreement they reached, then its terms must truly be onerous. They are counting on the length of the conflict, the sacrifices that have been made, and the pressure from the media to force strikers back to work.

Windsor city workers have fought for more than three months, in the face of the provocations of the city government and venomous media coverage, to defend

the right to decent post-retirement benefits.

It is not simply an issue that concerns the fate of the next generation, as important as that is.

To capitulate to the city on this question means that CUPE officials accept the principle that workers should pay for the economic crisis through the destruction of their living standards and conditions. The elimination of post-retirement benefits would only be the beginning. One concession after another will follow, as auto workers across North America have found out.

Windsor civic workers, along with Toronto municipal employees, have been portrayed as “selfish” and “greedy” because they have stood up to the claims of the employers and governments at every level that workers, with their “overly generous entitlements,” are responsible for the present crisis.

This is one of the great lies of our time. No section of the working population—not city workers in Windsor, auto workers at Chrysler and General Motors, Vale Inco workers, Via Rail workers, or auto parts workers in Windsor, Brampton, Toronto, Tillsonburg and Cornwall, who have recently organized plant occupations—is responsible for the present meltdown. The capitalist profit system is failing worldwide, and the burden of its failure is being placed squarely on the back of the working class.

There are two interrelated answers to the argument that “there is no money” to pay for decent wages and benefits for Windsor’s 1,800 municipal workers. First, if the present system cannot provide for the elementary needs of its working population, then that itself is an admission of bankruptcy. According to this logic, only the rich should be allowed to thrive within Canadian capitalism.

Second, of course, it is another lie that the resources don’t exist to guarantee Windsor municipal workers,

present and future, decent lives. But those resources are monopolized by the tiny corporate elite.

The *Windsor Star*, *Toronto Star*, *Globe and Mail*, *National Post*, and the rest of the big business media, say nothing about the fantastic salaries and privileges of the very wealthy.

In 2008, the CEOs of Canada's Big Five banks received more than \$25 million in compensation—an average of \$5 million apiece. Between 1995 and 2007, according to *Maclean's* magazine in May, "There's been a 444 percent salary increase for Canada's top CEOs. The top 10 earners collected a total of \$60.7 million in 1995—by 2007, that number had jumped to \$330.3 million."

In 2007, Gordon Nixon of the Royal Bank of Canada took home a total of \$44,270,084; Paul Desmarais of Power Corporation, \$29,292,829; Richard Waugh of Bank of Nova Scotia, \$16,004,233; Siegfried Wolf of Magna International Inc., \$13,359,110, and so forth.

According to one study, Canada's 100 richest CEOs, on average, would earn the average worker's *annual* wage of \$40,237 in *less than a day and a half* (33 hours).

These are the people, and their well-paid representatives in the media, who are telling Windsor workers to stop being "greedy."

City workers have fought with great determination, but CUPE leaders have restricted and isolated the strike. The only way the Windsor strike can be won is if it becomes part of an offensive by the entire working class against pay and benefit concessions, job losses and budget cuts. Such a campaign would win widespread support.

This means a political struggle against all the pro-capitalist parties, Liberals, Conservatives and NDP, and the building of a new socialist, internationalist party of the working class, fighting for a workers government that would redistribute the wealth and reorganize the economy on the basis of its democratic control by the population.

We urge Windsor workers to reject the concessions contract, and form committees independent of the union to prosecute the struggle. Rank-and-file workers have every right, in fact, at a certain point, the obligation, to take matters into their hands. This is how every important movement of the working class has emerged in the past, and this is the only way it will

happen here.

The authors also recommend:

Canada: Windsor municipal workers reject new concessions contract
[18 July 2009]

Canada: Worker resistance must be armed with a socialist strategy
[22 July 2009]



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